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VIṢṆU, ŚIVA, AND KĀLIDĀSA: REFERENCES TO THE DIVINITIES IN THE *MEGHADŪTA*

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Abstract

In Kālidāsa's famous lyrical poem, the *Meghadūta*, the most frequently mentioned divinities are Śiva and Viṣṇu, along with their *avatāras*, family members and attendants. The two gods appear in the context of geographical or mythological references, and in comparisons. Even though they are cited practically an equal number of times, their functions in the poem are in quite a contrast: Viṣṇu is connected to the past, to the *rasa* of love in separation (especially in the form of Rāma) and never appears as a contextual character in the narrative. Śiva, on the contrary, is about to be met in person by the cloud, he appears as a present, even ubiquitous deity, and, in the company of his wife, is connected to the *rasa* of love in union. Furthermore, Śiva (unlike Viṣṇu) also appears in devotional contexts, the cloud being requested by the exiled *yakṣa* to worship the god and his family in various shrines on its way to the Himālaya. This last point seems to confirm the usual contention that Kālidāsa was a Śivaite.

1. Introduction

Kālidāsa, the most famous of Indian poets, and his celebrated lyrical poem, the *Meghadūta*,¹ are both well-known, and hardly need an introduction. Kālidāsa probably lived during the early Gupta era, and “was born about 400 A.D. in the city of Ujjayinī (the modern Ujjain), a city he describes lovingly in the *Meghadūta*.” (Lienhard 1984: 115). It is generally accepted that he was “a devout worshipper of Śiva, though by no means a narrow-minded sectarian.” (See Kale 1969: ix).² Kālidāsa's religious affinities and affiliations have mostly been

1 KALE, 1969: vii, classifies the *Meghadūta* under the category of *khaṇḍa-kāvya*s (short poems) and calls it “the crest-jewel of Khaṇḍa-Kāvya” (1969: viii). It further falls into the sub-category of *sandēśakāvya*s or *dūtakāvya*s (messenger-poems), of which it is the most famous and oldest extant example, though probably not the first (see LIENHARD, 1984: 113–114).

2 See also LIENHARD, 1984: 115, who writes that Kālidāsa was a “Śivaite Brahman”.

studied in his *mahākāvya*s, the *Raghuvamśa* and the *Kumārasambhava*.³ In this paper, I propose to examine what is the state of affairs in the *Meghadūta*, and to analyse the *Meghadūta* from the perspective of its references to the divinities of Hinduism.

A cursory reading of the poem reveals that the gods most often alluded to are Viṣṇu and Śiva, along with their families, attendants, *avatāras*⁴ or manifestations. They are mentioned in the following verses (the references are given to Kale 1969): *Pūrvamegha*: 1.1 (V)⁵; 1.7 (Ś)⁶; 1.12 (V); 1.15 (V); 1.36 (Ś); 1.37 (Ś); 1.39 (Ś); 1.46 (Ś); 1.47 (Ś); 1.49 (V); 1.52 (V); 1.53 (Ś); 1.55 (Ś); 1.58 (Ś); 1.59 (Ś); 1.60 (V); 1.61 (Ś); 1.62 (V); 1.63 (Ś).⁷ *Uttaramegha*: 2.14 (Ś); 2.40 (V); 2.41 (V); 2.50 (V); 2.53 (Ś). This does not mean, of course, that the other gods are completely absent: some of them are mentioned, but they play a very minor role to say the least.⁸ We will therefore not dwell on them here, but concentrate on Viṣṇu and Śiva's respective roles in the poem. A preliminary remark concerning these two – of course major – gods of Hinduism is that they are used quite contrastively by the author of the *Meghadūta*, and they fulfill quite different functions in the poem. Symptomatic of this is the fact that they are never mentioned together in one and the same verse; and since each verse of the *Meghadūta* (entirely composed in the “slow moving” *mandākṛāntā* metre),

3 See esp. HILLEBRANDT, 1921 / GHOSAL, 1971, the chapter entitled “Kālidāsa's Philosophy and Belief”.

4 *Avatāras* of course essentially concern Viṣṇu. It seems beyond doubt that the personages who are nowadays accepted as *avatāras* of this god were already considered so by Kālidāsa. See for instance verse 1.15, where Kṛṣṇa is called “Viṣṇu in cowherd's garb”, or verse 1.60, where Vāmana is described, in a periphrastic designation, as “Viṣṇu when ready to put down Bali.”

5 (V) means that the verse alludes to Viṣṇu (or allied characters).

6 (Ś) means that the verse alludes to Śiva (or allied characters).

7 As the cloud reaches northern India and the Himālayas, we notice a sudden cluster of allusions to Viṣṇu and Śiva.

8 The other gods or divine beings mentioned in the poem are: Kubera, the god of riches, and the *yakṣa*'s direct over-lord, who has no other role in the poem than that of punishing the *yakṣa* for some fault of his, and sending him into exile (1.1); he is not mentioned by name but only called *bhartṛ* (master) in 1.1; and *dhana-pati*- (lord of riches) in 2.14 (in the compound *dhana-pati-sakha* which designates Śiva); Indra, who is indirectly referred to by an allusion to his bow, that is to say the rain-bow (*dhanuḥ khaṇḍam ākhaṇḍalasya*, 1.15); Agni, the bearer of oblations (*huta-vaha*, 1.46), who appears in connection with Skanda's birth; Brahmā, who is only mentioned once, very indirectly, in the compound *Brahmāvarta* (1.51), the holy land where the field of the Kurus is situated; Indra's elephant Airāvata (1.65) whose face the cloud is requested to cover for a moment.

functions mostly as a closed entity, the two gods are in a sense kept apart by the metre itself.

2. Viṣṇu

Let us first examine Viṣṇu's role in the poem. The references to Viṣṇu are graphically represented in *Table 1*.

Column 1 shows the verses in which Viṣṇu appears. A cursory glance reveals that Viṣṇu (and / or allied personages and manifestations) appears in a total of 10 verses (out of approximately 120 verses contained in the *Meghadūta*): 7 in the first song and 3 in the second song. The references are sprinkled over the first song, and rather clustered in the second.

Column 2 shows that Viṣṇu is mentioned under various shapes and manifestations: as Rāma (1.1; 1.12; 2.41); as Kṛṣṇa (1.15); as Viṣṇu himself (1.49; 2.50); as Paraśurāma (1.60); as Vāmana (1.60). Allied characters are Rāma's wife Sītā (1.1; 2.40); Kṛṣṇa's brother Balarāma (1.52; 1.62), and the monkey Hanumat, Rāma's faithful ally in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.40).

Column 3 lists the actual names under which these personages are mentioned, which often differ from the most commonly used names I have chosen to give in the second column: some are patronymics, others periphrastic designations, or else, they refer to some characteristic of the personage.

Column 4 describes the occasions on which the god is mentioned: we see that the allusions to Viṣṇu and allied figures basically serve three purposes in the poem: *geography*, *mythology* and *comparison*. Mostly two or three of these at the same time. (The exact context is summarised in *column 5*.) We shall presently examine more closely the contents of column 4.

Verse	Personage	Given Name	Occasion	Remarks
1.1	Rāma Sītā	<i>rāma-giri-</i> (Rāma's mountain) <i>janaka-tanayā-</i> (Janaka's daughter)	geography mythology	the <i>yakṣa</i> sojourns on Mt Rāmagiri, the waters of which are purified by Sītā's baths
1.12	Rāma	<i>raghu-pati-</i> (Lord of the Raghus)	geography mythology	Rāmagiri bears the imprint of Rāma's feet
1.15	Kṛṣṇa	<i>gopa-veśasya viṣṇoḥ</i> (of Viṣṇu in cowherd's garb)	comparison mythology	cloud = Kṛṣṇa
1.49	Viṣṇu	<i>śārṅgiṇaḥ</i> (of the archer)	comparison	cloud = Viṣṇu
1.52	Balarāma	<i>lāṅgalī</i> (possessing a plough)	geography mythology comparison	like Balarāma before him, the cloud should drink the waters of Sarasvatī
1.60	Paraśurāma Vāmana	<i>bhṛgu-pati-</i> (lord of Bhṛgu) <i>baliniyamanā-</i> <i>bhyudyatasya ...</i> <i>viṣṇoḥ</i> (of Viṣṇu ready to overpower Bali)	geography mythology comparison	Paraśurāma pierced a hole in Mt Krauñca; cloud = Viṣṇu's foot
1.62	Balarāma	<i>hala-bhṛtaḥ</i> (of the plough-bearer)	comparison mythology geography	white Kailāsa = Balarāma; cloud = his dark dress
2.40	Hanumat Sītā	<i>pavana-tanayam</i> (the son of the wind) <i>maithilī</i> (princess of Mithilā)	comparison mythology	cloud messenger = Hanumat; <i>yakṣa</i> 's wife = Sītā
2.41	Rāma	<i>rāma-giri-</i> (Rāma's mountain)	geography mythology? comparison ?	the <i>yakṣa</i> is on Mt Rāmagiri; comparison between <i>yakṣa</i> and Rāma ?
2.50	Viṣṇu	<i>śārṅga-pāṇau</i> (wielding the bow)	indication of time mythology	the separation will end when Viṣṇu rises from his sleep

Table 1: Viṣṇu in the *Meghadūta*

By *geography*⁹, I mean that a particular spot on the route of the cloud bears traces, or reminds the *yakṣa* of, a (past) exploit of Viṣṇu, mostly accomplished in the form of one of his *avatāras*. These spots are the following: Mt Rāmagiri (Rāma's mountain), somewhere in central India, the place of the *yakṣa*'s exile in the *Meghadūta*, and also the place where Rāma sojourned in a hermitage with his wife Sītā during their exile to the forest (1.1; 1.12; 2.41). This mountain marks the beginning of the cloud's journey. Further north, on the cloud's route, the Sarasvatī, the pure waters of which the cloud should drink, like Balarāma did before him during his pilgrimage on the same river (1.52); close to the cloud's destination, Mt Krauñca, which Paraśurāma pierced with an arrow, and through whose hole the *haṃsas* now conveniently travel to lake Mānasa (1.60), and Mt Kailāsa, which is compared to Balarāma (1.62).

As we can see, the category geography is closely allied to the category I call *mythology*: mostly, references are made to some *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Paraśurāma, Vāmana, all human *avatāras*), thus to an event that happened mostly in the distant past. Here we can look at verse 1.1 of the *Meghadūta*, which exemplifies both categories (geography and mythology):

*kaścit kāntāvirahaguruṇā svādhikārapramattaḥ
śāpenāstaṃgamitamahimā varṣabhogyena bhartuḥ /
yakṣaś cakre janakatanayāsnānapuṇyodakeṣu
snigdhačchāyāturuṣu vasatiṃ rāmagiryāśrameṣu // 1.1 //*

A certain Yakṣa, who had grossly swerved from his duty and was (therefore) deprived of his greatness by his lord's curse, to be suffered for a year and unbearable owing (as it led) to his separation from his beloved wife, took up his abode among the hermitages on Rāmagiri which had a thick growth of the Nameru (*or*, shady) trees about them, and the waters wherein were rendered holy by the ablutions of Janaka's daughter (Sītā).¹⁰

Here, geography (the reference to Mt Rāmagiri) is linked with mythology: the verse refers to Rāma and Sītā, who stayed on the same mountain during their

9 The importance of the *Meghadūta* for the geography of ancient India has long been acknowledged. Thus LIENHARD, 1984: 118, note 184: "The information Kālidāsa gives here, like the data in other *dūta* poems, is of considerable importance to historical geography. The route given in the *Meghadūta* runs from Mount Rāmagiri in the Vindhya range over the country of Māla, Mount Āmrakūṭa, the city of Vidiśā (modern Bhilsa) in the land of Daśārṇa, crosses the rivers Nirvindhya and Sindhu on to Ujjayinī, the city of Daśapura, the holy land between the rivers Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī, to which Kurukṣetra belongs, and finishes up near Lake Mānasa, on Mount Kailāsa, on whose summit lies Alakā, the city of the gods."

10 I will quote the translations of KALE, 1969, throughout, with occasional slight modifications.

exile. This verse is of course programmatic for the whole poem, with its evocation of Rāma and Sītā, the ideal, yet too often separated couple, and sets the mood or *rasa* of *vipralambha-śṛṅgāra* (love in separation), the dominant tonality of the whole poem. We notice the significant use in the first line of the term *viraha*: separation.¹¹

By *comparison*,¹² I mean that either the cloud, the *yakṣa*, or his wife (personages contextually linked to the *Meghadūta*) are compared to Viṣṇu, or allied figures. The comparison may arise due to some shared physical characteristics, or else, due to the similar situation they find themselves in.

Comparisons involving the cloud are most frequent, and often play on its dark colour: being a monsoon cloud, filled with rain, it is naturally black. As such, comparisons with Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa come very readily, and mostly form part of extended comparisons, such as, for instance, in verse 1.15. Here the cloud, dark in hue and adorned with a rain-bow, is likened by means of an *upamā* (*iva*) to “Viṣṇu in cowherd’s garb” (= Kṛṣṇa), adorned with a peacock feather:

- 11 This *rasa* is strengthened by the depiction of the stage of love called *unmāda* (confusion), displayed by the *yakṣa* when he talks to the cloud, an insentient being (cf. verse 1.5). See Mallinātha’s commentary ad verse 1.1: *atra raso vipralambhākhyah śṛṅgārah / tatrāpy unmādāvasthā /*

Separation – this time between two male friends – remains the theme of the next verse which mentions Rāma (1.12):

*āpṛcchasva priyasakham amuṃ tuṅgam āliṅgya śailaṃ
vandyaiḥ puṃsāṃ raghupatipadair aṅkitaṃ mekhalāsu /
kāle kāle bhavati bhavato yasya saṃyogam etya
snehavyaktiś ciravirahajaṃ muñcato bāṣpaṃ uṣṇam // 1.12 //*

Having embraced this lofty mountain, your dear friend, take leave of him who is marked on his slopes with the imprint of Rāma’s feet worthy of being adored by men; – of him, whose affection for you is evinced, as he, on coming in contact with (meeting) you, every season sheds hot tears due to long separation.

Since the cloud has to travel further north, it has to part from its friend the mountain. The mountain seems to shed tears of sadness in the form of vapour (*bāṣpa* meaning both tears and vapour). The two friends’ long separation (*cira-viraha*) of course indirectly evokes the long separation between Rāma and Sītā and that between the *yakṣa* and his wife. We may note that Rāma and Sītā were separated for approximately one year during Sītā’s captivity on Laṅkā. Likewise, the *yakṣa* and his wife (*varṣa-bhogyena*, 1.1) and the cloud and the mountain, have to stay apart for one year: the mountain will have to wait till the next monsoon for the cloud to return.

- 12 My use of the term comparison is not restricted to *upamā* only, it may also include metaphor (*rūpaka*), fancy (*utprekṣā*), or even allusion (*dhvani*).

*ratnacchāyāvvyatikara iva prekṣyam etat purastād
vālmikāgrāt prabhavati dhanuḥ khaṇḍam ākhaṇḍalasya /
yena śyāmaṃ vapur atitarāṃ kāntim āpatsyate te
barheṇeva sphuritarucinā gopaveśasya viṣṇoḥ // 1.15 //*

Here appears to view in front, from the top of an ant-hill, a fragment of Indra's bow, attractive like an intermingling of the streaming rays of gems by which your dark body will attain an exceedingly charming splendour, like that of Viṣṇu in his cowherd's garb, by peacock's feathers with their glowing splendour.

In 1.49 a, the cloud is called "the robber of the bowman (Viṣṇu)'s colour" (*śārṇ-giṇo varṇacaure*), again an allusion to its dark colour, and in 1.60 d, it is said to be "dark like the foot of Viṣṇu ready to overpower Bali" (*śyāmaḥ pādo balini-yamanābhyudyatasyeva viṣṇoḥ*). In this verse, the comparison is not only motivated by the cloud's colour, but also by its elongated shape (*tiryagāyāmasobhī*: "beautiful due to your length extended crosswise" 1.60 c). In 1.62, when it sits very black on the white Mt Kailāsa, the latter is compared to the equally white Balarāma who is wearing a black garment on his shoulder.

A comparison which is brought about by a similarity of situation occurs in the second song of the *Meghadūta* (2.40–41), in a couple of famous verses.¹³ In 2.40, the cloud, as it finally delivers its message to the forlorn *yakṣa*'s wife, is aptly compared to Hanumat, the son of the wind (note that the epithet *pavanatanaya* is cleverly chosen to fit both Hanumat and the cloud) conveying Rāma's greetings to the afflicted Sītā when she is Rāvaṇa's captive.¹⁴ This verse is skillfully brought about by the preceding description of the desperate predicament of the *yakṣa*'s wife, quite comparable indeed to that of Sītā in Laṅkā.¹⁵ Verse 2.41 mentions the sorrowing *yakṣa* who is exiled in Rāmagiri, and thus of course evokes rather straightforwardly the comparison between him and Rāma (especially in the phrasing "*tava saha caro rāma* [...]" in 2.41 b):

*ityākhyāte pavanatanayaṃ maithilīvonmukhī sā
tvām utkaṇṭhacchvasitahṛdayā vīkṣya saṃbhāvyā caiva /*

- 13 Famous, because they probably gave rise to the (controversial) idea that Kālidāsa was inspired to write the *Meghadūta* from the *Rāmāyaṇa* scene where Hanumat delivers Rāma's message to Sītā. This is mentioned in Mallinātha's commentary *ad Meghadūta* 1.1: *sītāṃ prati rāmasya hanūmatsaṃdeśaṃ manasi nidhāya meghasaṃdeśaṃ kaviḥ kṛtavān ity āhuḥ*.
- 14 With an inversion in the direction taken by the two messengers: Rāma resides near Kiṣkindhā and Hanumat "flies" south to Laṅkā to find Sītā, whereas the *yakṣa* resides on Mt Rāmagiri and the cloud flies north to Alakā.
- 15 Rāvaṇa is moreover referred to earlier, in 2.13, for attacking the city of Alakā, thus rendering the threat more proximate.

*śroṣyaty asmāt paramavahitā saumya sīmantinīnām
kāntodantaḥ suhr̥dupanataḥ saṃgamāt kiṃcid ūnaḥ // 2.40 //*

*tām āyusman mama ca vacanād ātmanaś copakartuṃ
brūyā evaṃ tava saḥacaro rāmagiryāśramasthaḥ /
avyāpannaḥ kuśalam abale pr̥cchati tvām viyuktaḥ
pūrvābhāṣyaṃ sulabhavipadām prāṇinām etad eva // 2.41 //*

This being said, she, with her heart swelling with eagerness, and her face lifted up, will look at you and honour you, as Maithilī (Sītā) did the son of Wind (Hanumat) and then, being attentive, will hear from you what is to be said next: For, O gentle one, to women, tidings about their husbands, obtained from friends, are little short of actual union.

O you of long life, at my request and also to bless yourself, say this to her – “Your consort, residing in a hermitage on Rāmagiri, who is safe (alive), asks you, O weak one, being separated from you, about your welfare”: (for) in the case of creatures who fall easy victims to perils, this alone is the first thing to be inquired after.

Of course, here the cloud finally gets to deliver its message (at least in the *yakṣa*’s imagination), thus bringing about a union of sorts between the separated lovers (as 2.40 d remarks). But the situation is still one of separation, and again this is underscored by the chosen vocabulary: the *yakṣa* is *vīyukta* (separated) and *avyāpanna* (“not dead”, but also implying “barely alive”). With these two verses, we have come full circle in the cloud’s imaginary travel: from Rāmagiri to Alakā, and now back to Rāmagiri.

To sum up, the following are the salient points that emerge from the allusions to Viṣṇu and allied personages in the *Meghadūta*:

- *Viṣṇu never appears in person*, as a contextual character in the poem. He is mentioned either in comparisons, or because his *avatāras* (or the latter’s companions) left traces on the landscape: purified waters and foot-prints on Mt Rāmagiri (1.1 and 1.12) and a hole in Mt Krauñca (1.60). In these cases, the mythical deeds of the god serve as geographical markers.
- *Viṣṇu is mostly mentioned in relation to the past*. This is a consequence of the previous point, since his mythical deeds took place in the distant past. On the rare occasions where a conjugated verb is used (for the *Meghadūta* mostly makes use of nominal compounds), it is the past perfect tense, which serves to indicate a very distant past (e.g. in 1.52: *siṣeve* [he drank, or resorted to]). Viṣṇu is only once mentioned in relation to the future, in

verse 2.50, which serves as an indication of time: in his message, the *yakṣa* lets his beloved know that their separation will end in four months' time, at the end of the monsoon, when Viṣṇu rises from his sleep on the serpent Śeṣa.¹⁶ We see that Kālidāsa actually has a good excuse for not making Viṣṇu intervene in person in his poem: in the monsoon, Viṣṇu is asleep!¹⁷

- *The rasas evoked in connection with Viṣṇu are:* the heroic feeling (*vīra-rasa*), in verse 1.60, which mentions Paraśurāma and Vāmana's exploits. Otherwise, the verses referring to Rāma and Sītā (1.1; 1.12; 2.40–41) clearly suggest the feeling of love in separation (*vipralambha-śṛṅgāra-rasa*).

3. Śiva

Let us now similarly look at the verses that mention Śiva and his family. (See *Table 2*).

Looking at *column 1*, the first thing we notice is that the references to Śiva and his family are slightly more numerous than those to Viṣṇu (14 in the case of Śiva, 10 in the case of Viṣṇu), and much more numerous in the first than in the second song.¹⁸

Verse	Personage	Given Name	Occasion	Remarks
1.7	Śiva	-hara- (the remover)	geography	Śiva resides in the outer garden of Alakā
1.36	Śiva	<i>bhartuḥ</i> (of the master) <i>tribhuvana-guror</i>	comparison geography	cloud = Śiva's neck

16 Note that in this connection, no mention is made of Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu's spouse, whereas iconographically, the image of the goddess massaging her sleeping husband's feet, or else attending on him, is quite well-known, also to Kālidāsa himself (cf. *Raghuvamśa* 10.8; ref. to Scharpé 1964). See UPADHYAYA, 1947: 317.

17 This, by the way, makes Viṣṇu quite literally a "fair-weather friend", who sleeps oblivious of the *yakṣa*'s distress.

18 This is perhaps due to the fact that in the second song the cloud has reached its destination, Alakā, and that therefore the geographical "pretexts" for mentioning the god on the way are lacking.

		(of the lord of the three worlds) <i>caṇḍīśvarasya</i> (of Caṇḍī's husband) <i>caṇḍī-</i> (the fierce one)		the cloud should visit Śiva's residence in Ujjayinī
	Pārvatī			
1.37	Śiva	<i>śūlinah</i> (of the trident bearer)	geography comparison worship	visit of Śiva's Mahākāla temple in Ujjayinī; thunder = sound of drum; by thundering, the cloud is asked to participate in the evening worship
1.39	Śiva Pārvatī	<i>paśu-pater</i> (of the lord of beasts) <i>bhavānyā</i> (by Bhavānī, the wife of Bhava)	comparison worship mythology	the red evening cloud should take the place of Śiva's bloody elephant hide, thereby allaying the goddess' fear
1.46	Skanda Śiva	<i>skandam</i> <i>nava-śaśi-bhṛtā</i> (by the bearer of the new moon)	geography worship mythology	the cloud should visit Devagiri, Skanda's residence; it should bathe Skanda with flowers; allusion to Skanda's birth
1.47	Skanda Śiva Pārvatī Peacock	<i>pāvakes</i> (of the son of the fire) <i>hara-</i> (the remover) <i>bhavānī</i> (the wife of Bhava) <i>mayūram</i>	worship	by thundering, the cloud should make Skanda's peacock dance
1.53	Śiva Pārvatī Gaṅgā	<i>śaṃbhoḥ</i> (of the benevolent one) <i>gaurī-</i> (the white one) <i>jāhnoḥ kanyām</i> (the daughter of Jahnu)	geography mythology	the cloud will reach the Ganges near Mt Kanakhala; allusion to Gaṅgā's descent from heaven
1.55	Nandin Śiva	<i>tri-nayana-vṛṣa-</i> (the bull of the three-eyed one) <i>tri-nayana-</i> (the three-eyed one)	geography comparison	sitting on white Himālaya, the cloud will look like a mass of mud dug up by Nandin
1.58	Śiva	<i>ardhendu-mauleḥ</i> (of the one whose diadem is the half-moon)	geography worship	the cloud should worship Śiva's footprint impressed on a stone-slab

1.59	Śiva	<i>paśu-pates</i> (of the lord of beasts)	comparison worship	thunder = sound of drum for Śiva's worship
1.61	Śiva	<i>try-ambakasya</i> (of the three-eyed one)	geography comparison mythology	Kailāsa's white peaks look like Śiva's laugh when Rāvaṇa tried to shake the mountain
1.63	Śiva Pārvaṭī	<i>śaṃbhunā</i> (by the benevolent one) <i>gaurī</i> (the white one)	geography comparison worship	when Gaurī, with Śiva, takes a walk on Kailāsa, the cloud should become a flight of stairs to help her climb the mountain
2.14	Śiva	<i>dhana-pati-sakhaṃ</i> [...] <i>sākṣād vasantam</i> (the friend of the lord of riches, living there in person)	geography mythology	description of Alakā, where Kāma fears to come in person; allusion to the enmity between Love and Śiva
2.53	Nandin Śiva	<i>tri-nayana-vṛṣa-</i> (the three-eyed god's bull)	geography mythology	the mountain is dug up by Śiva's bull

Table 2: Śiva in the *Meghadūta*

If we look at *columns 2 and 3*, we see that in all these occurrences, Śiva himself is mentioned, under various names, epithets, periphrases. Quite a few times, his name is mentioned even when he himself is not directly meant: for instance, in 2.53, *trinayana-Vṛṣa-* (the three-eyed one's bull) designates Nandin. His wife, Pārvaṭī, is mentioned five times (1.36; 1.39; 1.47; 1.53; 1.63), under various denominations, always in the company of her husband, sometimes with her son Skanda. Skanda himself is mentioned twice, in the company of one or both parents, and with his peacock (1.46; 1.47).¹⁹ Finally, Nandin, Śiva's white bull,²⁰ is cited twice (1.55; 2.53) and Pārvaṭī's sister, the Gaṅgā, here imagined to be a rival for the jealous Pārvaṭī, is mentioned once (1.53). The one member of Śiva's family who is conspicuously missing is Gaṇeśa, who is never mentioned at all.²¹

19 The peacock is of course the monsoon-bird *par excellence*. It is said to dance in this season, displaying its magnificent plumage. See FELLER, 1995: 159–160.

20 Unlike in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* (cf. 3.41, ref. to SCHARPÉ, 1958), Nandin is not represented in human shape, but always as a real bull in the *Meghadūta*: this is because he is in both instances mentioned in connection with the (bullish) activity of digging up mountain-slopes with his horns.

21 Even though images of Gaṇeśa are found from the 4th or 5th centuries C.E. (cf. NARAIN, 1991: 19), i.e. roughly Kālidāsa's time, stories about Gaṇeśa, especially those concerning

Column 4 lists the occasions on which Śiva is mentioned. We see that the same three categories are found again: *geography*, *mythology* and *comparison*, but with the addition of one more, extremely important, category, which I call *worship*. We shall presently review these categories in the above order.

The category *geography* contains descriptions of places where Śiva's mythical exploits took place (as already seen in the case of Viṣṇu) and also – and this is new – descriptions of temples or sacred places of worship dedicated to the god and his family, or places where they are said to reside: thus, the heavenly city Alakā, whose gardens are inhabited by Śiva, is first mentioned as the cloud's ultimate destination (1.7); then, Śiva's Mahākāla temple in Ujjayinī (1.36–1.39);²² Devagiri, Skanda's sacred mountain (1.45–1.47); Mt Kanakhala,²³ where the Ganges comes down to the plains (1.53); a stone-slab on which Śiva's foot is impressed, and which the Siddhas worship (1.58); Mt Kailāsa, one of the god's favourite residences (1.61–1.63), and finally, again Alakā (2.14). With this last mention of Alakā as the god's residence, we come full circle, back to verse 1.7.

The category I call *mythology* contains allusions to the following myths concerning Śiva and his family: the slaying of Gajāśura (1.39); Skanda's complicated birth through Agni, to help the gods slay the Asuras (1.46); the descent of the Gaṅgā (1.53); Rāvaṇa's fruitless attempt to shake Kailāsa and topple Śiva from the mountain (1.61); and finally, the enmity between Kāmadeva and the god Śiva (2.14). Some of these mythological allusions are motivated by the description of the places visited by the cloud.

As in the case of Viṣṇu, the *comparisons* mostly involve the cloud. In 1.37 and 1.59, its thunder is likened to the sound of the drum used at Śiva's worship.

his “familial role”, gain prominence in Purāṇic literature only between 600 and 1300 C.E., long after the poet's time. See BROWN, 1991: 183.

22 Mahākāla (lit. Great Time or Death) is one of the 12 so-called *Jyotirlingas*, holy places dedicated to Śiva. (For the complete list, see KALE, 1969: 66.) In verse 1.36, Kālidāsa designates it as *pūṇyam* [...] *tribhuvanaguror dhāma caṇḍīśvarasya*: “the holy abode of the Lord of the three worlds, the husband of Caṇḍī”. It is hard to determine what kind of structure it actually was in Kālidāsa's time, for it is not further described, except for the fact that it had a garden (*udyaṇa*) (verse 1.36). For the sake of convenience, we shall call it a temple, but it may not have been the huge structure it is today.

23 “Kanakhala is the name of a *Tīrtha* or holy place (still retained) near Haridwar where the Ganges descends into the low ground of Hindustan.” (KALE, 1969: 91).

Frequently, the comparisons arise due to its dark colour: in 1.36, it is likened to Śiva's blue neck, and hence watched affectionately by Śiva's *gaṇas* (cf. comparisons with Kṛṣṇa's colour in 1.15 and 1.49). In 1.55, the black cloud sitting on white Himālaya looks like mud dug up by Nandin (cf. 1.62, where the black cloud on the white mountain is likened to the – white – Balarāma's dark dress). Once, due to its exceptionally reddish hue in the evening light, the cloud takes the place of the elephant-demon Gajāśura's bloody hide, which Śiva uses for his dance. Let us quote this verse, which also involves the categories mythology and worship, and even – though somewhat indirectly – geography, since the scene is in Ujjayinī's Mahākāla temple, during the evening-worship:

*paścād uccair bhujataruvanaṃ maṇḍalenābhilīnaḥ
sāṃdhyam tejaḥ pratinavajapāpuṣparaktaṃ dadhānaḥ /
nṛttārambhe hara paśupater ādranāgājineccchām
śāntodvegastimitanayanaṃ dṛṣṭabhaktir bhavānyā // 1.39 //*

Thereafter, at the commencement of Śiva's dance, resting in a round form on the lofty forests of his arms, possessing the twilight lustre as red as the fresh-blown *japā* flower, do you remove the desire for the wet elephant's hide of the Lord of creatures,²⁴ your devotion being marked by Bhavānī with her eyes steady owing to her inward agitation being calmed down.

As we have noted above, the category *worship* is restricted to Śiva and his family, it is missing in the allusions to Viṣṇu.²⁵ The very existence of this category is certainly due to the fact that most geographical spots mentioned in connection with Śiva are precisely places of worship – temples or holy grounds. While listing these occurrences, one thing became very clear: the main aim of the cloud's journey is of course to take a message to the *yakṣa*'s wife. But the secondary, though equally important aim, is to perform a *yātrā*, a pilgrimage along all the sacred sites of Śiva, ultimately leading to Mt Kailāsa – to this day still an important place of pilgrimage – and the city of Alakā, and worship the

24 In this verse there is actually a triple comparison: the cloud is likened to the twilight lustre, to the new *japā*-flower, and to the elephant-hide.

25 There is only one instance where worship is mentioned in connection with a Vaiṣṇava place. In verse 1.12 b, Mt Rāmagiri is said to be “marked on its slopes with the imprint of Rāma's feet worthy of being adored by men” (*vandyaiḥ puṃsām raghupatipadair ankitam mekhalāsu*). In his commentary, Mallinātha equates *puṃsām* with *nara*- (men). “Men” would seem to exclude *yakṣas* as well as clouds, perhaps implying that Rāma is good enough for humans to worship, but not for supernatural beings, who adore Śiva? (Cf. also verse 1.58 where Śiva's foot-print is said to be worshipped by the Siddhas.)

god and his family on the way. This pilgrimage is to be performed at the *yakṣa*'s request and on his behalf, since he himself is unable (or forbidden) to move away from Mt Rāmagiri – ironically enough, a Vaiṣṇava place!

What kinds of acts of worship are requested from the cloud? Quite a wide range of them, which are especially suited to its cloud-nature: in 1.37, 1.47, and 1.59, it is asked to thunder, and thus act as a drum at Śiva's evening worship, or to make Skanda's peacock dance. In verse 1.58, bent in devotion, it should circumambulate (*bhaktinamraḥ parīyāḥ*) Śiva's footprint on a stone-slab. In 1.39 (quoted above), it should act as the bloody elephant hide which Śiva uses for his dance, thus allaying Pārvaṭī's fear of the gory sight. In 1.46 a–b, which describes Mt Devagiri, Skanda's sacred mountain, the *yakṣa* requires something like magic from the cloud: first it should turn itself into a cloud of flowers,²⁶ and then bathe Skanda by means of "a shower of flowers wet with the waters of the heavenly Ganges":

*tatra skandaṃ niyatavasatiṃ puṣpameghīkṛtāmā
puṣpāsāraiḥ snapayatu bhavān vyomagaṅgājalādrāiḥ /
rakṣāhetor navaśaśibhṛtā vāsavīnām camūnām
atyādityaṃ hutavahamukhe saṃbhṛtaṃ tad dhi tejaḥ // 1.46 //*

Your form changed into a cloud of flowers, you should bathe Skanda, who has taken permanent abode there, with showers of flowers, wet with the water of the heavenly Ganges. For he is (none other than) his own energy, surpassing the sun in brightness, that was placed by the bearer of the young moon (Śiva) in the mouth of Agni for the protection of the armies of Indra.

Finally, in 1.63, the *yakṣa* requests another extraordinary deed from the cloud: it should turn into a solid and circular flight of steps to help Gaurī ascend Kailāsa:

*hitvā tasmin bhujagavalayaṃ śaṃbhunā dattahastā
krīḍāśaile yadi ca vicaret pādacāreṇa gaurī /
bhaṅgībhaktyā viracitavapuḥ stambhitāntarjalaughāḥ
sopānatvaṃ kuru maṇitaṭārohaṇāyāgrayāyī // 1.63 //*

And if Gaurī, a helping hand being given to her by Śaṃbhu leaving off his serpent-bracelets, should walk about on foot on that pleasure mountain, preceding her, form yourself with the internal mass of water hardened into a line of ascending curves and become a flight of steps for her to ascend its jewelled slope.

26 Here, in his commentary, Mallinātha refers back to verse 1.6, where the *yakṣa* declares the cloud to be *kāma-rūpa* (able to assume any form at will).

This verse is a picture of conjugal bliss: Śiva helps Pārvatī climb the mountain, he gives her his hand, from which he has moreover removed the snake-bracelet, so as not to frighten her. The quiet atmosphere is here underscored by the name used for Śiva: Śambhu, the benevolent, pacific one. Unlike Sītā from Rāma, or the *yakṣī* from the *yakṣa*, Pārvatī is never separated from her husband, she is always mentioned in connection with him in the verses of the *Meghadūta*. Indeed, the two form a remarkably happy and devoted couple, showing affection to each other and living in perfect harmony,²⁷ thus giving rise to the feeling of love in union (*saṃbhoga-śṛṅgāra*).²⁸

Of course, due to its nature, the cloud can (or is at least asked to) perform certain extraordinary deeds of worship which are inaccessible to the common mortals (like turning into a cloud of flowers or a flight of steps). On the other hand, playing the drum, bathing, bowing, showering with flowers, circumambulating, are ordinary acts of worship, and we see that the cloud is actually performing a complete *pūjā* of Śiva and his family on the way to its destination. Indeed, the poet frequently mentions the cloud's devotion, its *bhakti*.²⁹ *Bhakti* is often stated to be an essentially Vaiṣṇava phenomenon, but in the *Meghadūta* its use is restricted to Śiva and his family only.

27 Except perhaps in one verse (1.53) where Pārvatī is said to be jealous of the Gaṅgā.

28 This affection and harmony is also extended to the couple's offspring. This is seen for instance in verse 1.47, which seems the poetic equivalent of certain miniature paintings depicting the peaceful "holy family" (Śiva, Pārvatī, their son[s] and animals) on the dramatic backdrop of the mountains swathed in dark monsoon-clouds:

jyotirlekhāvalayī galitaṃ yasya barhaṃ bhavānī
putrapremṇā kuvalayadalaprāpi karṇe karoti /
dhautāpāṅgaṃ haraśaśirucā pāvakes taṃ mayūraṃ
paścād adrigrahaṇagurubhir garjitair nartayethāḥ // 1.47 //

Thereafter, with your thunderings prolonged by their being echoed by the mountain, do you make that Skanda's peacock dance, the outer corners of whose eyes are brightened by the lustre of Śiva's moon, and whose moulted feather, bearing circles of streaks of lustre, Bhavānī, out of affection for her son, places on her ear, usually the seat of a blue lotus-petal. Out of affection (*premnā*) for her son, Pārvatī decorates her ear with his peacock's feather instead of her usual blue lotus. Note that the feather was not forcibly plucked, but had been moulted, i.e., had fallen by itself (*galita*), which denotes an absence of violence extended to all beings. Here Śiva's (peaceful) presence is only very subtly alluded to by the fact that "the outer corners of the peacock's eyes are brightened by the lustre of Śiva's moon."

29 See verse 1.39: "your devotion being observed by Bhavānī" (*drṣṭābhaktir bhavānyā*); 1.58: bent in devotion (*bhakti-namrah*); also, indirectly, 1.63, where *bhakti* means "distribution", but the meaning "devotion" is certainly also evoked.

We can now sum up our findings concerning the god Śiva in the *Meghadūta*:

- *Śiva appears in person* in the *Meghadūta*, as a contextual character. The cloud will personally meet him and his family, and interact with them. Thus Śiva is very much a *sākṣad-devatā* (cf. 2.14: *devam [...] sākṣad vasantam*). Moreover, the fact that Śiva seems to be residing simultaneously in so many different places (in Ujjayinī (1.36–39), on Devagiri (1.45–47), on Kailāsa (1.63), in Alakā (1.7 & 2.14)) lends him the quality of ubiquity.
- As a consequence of the above, *Śiva is mainly connected to the Meghadūta's contextual present*. Of course, as in the case of Viṣṇu, the *Meghadūta* mentions some of Śiva's past mythical exploits,³⁰ but mostly he and his family are described as presently living in the places that the cloud will visit.
- The *rasa* most often evoked in connection with Śiva, whenever he is with Pārvatī, is the sentiment of love in union (*sambhoga-śṛṅgāra*) (1.39; 1.63).³¹

4. Conclusions

Let us now briefly sum up our findings concerning the respective roles of Viṣṇu and Śiva in the *Meghadūta*. Even though the two gods are mentioned nearly an equal number of times, their role and importance are very different in Kālidāsa's poem:

- 30 It is interesting to note that very often Śiva's past exploits are still relevant for the present context of the *Meghadūta*: they exert an influence on the present, or their effect extends up to the present. Thus, the slaying of Gajāśura took place in the past, but Śiva still makes use of his flayed and bloody skin during his dance (1.39); he sired Skanda long ago, but Skanda is still very much alive and present (1.46); Rāvaṇa's attack on Kailāsa took place in the past, but Śiva's laugh on that occasion still subsists, as it were accumulated as the white mass of mount Kailāsa (1.61); the God of Love still does not dare to enter Alakā, due to Śiva's past attack on him (2.14).
- 31 Except perhaps in 1.53 (as mentioned above), and in 2.14, which depicts Śiva as the enemy of Manmatha, the god of love, alluding to the incidents that happen at the beginning of the *Kumārasambhava*.

- stylistically speaking, Viṣṇu (especially as his *avatāra* Rāma) is linked to love in separation, thus reflecting the *yakṣa*'s present unhappy predicament, whereas Śiva and Pārvatī are linked to love in union. As a happy, ever-united couple, they represent what the *yakṣa* aspires to.
- Viṣṇu is mentioned in connection with the past, especially in his mythological role as an *avatāra*; Śiva is mostly mentioned in connection with the present.
- Viṣṇu never appears in person, but only in the context of comparisons, or because some traces of his presence are left on the landscape, whereas Śiva and his family are shown as presently living in certain holy places and will be met in person by the cloud, if it takes the prescribed route.
- Viṣṇu is absent (or at least asleep) and physically and temporally distant, whereas Śiva is ubiquitous and physically and temporally near.
- Śiva and his family are connected with temples (notably the Mahākāla temple in Ujjayinī) or holy groves, like Mt Devagiri, in short, with places of worship. This is not so for Viṣṇu.³² Even though temple-construction was only at its initial stages in early Gupta times, it seems likely that some temples dedicated to Viṣṇu already existed. Therefore, it appears deliberate on the part of the poet not to have mentioned any on the cloud's route.³³

32 It is not clear whether Mt Rāmagiri (diversely identified, see KALE, 1969: 5), was supposed to be an active place for the worship of Rāma – at least in Kālidāsa's imagination. The fact that he exiles there a supernatural being like the *yakṣa* rather seems to point to a deserted spot.

33 For caves and temples dedicated to Viṣṇu in Gupta times, see DESAI, 1973: 9, 17, 100. We may mention, especially, the famous Viṣṇu temple in Deogarh, dating from the second quarter of the 5th century C.E. (hence presumably contemporary with Kālidāsa's time). This temple has a sculpture representing Viṣṇu asleep on the serpent Ananta (see AGRAWALA, 1981: plate 68), a scene which Kālidāsa alludes to in verse 2.50 of his poem, as we have seen. Deogarh is a little north of the city of Vidiśā, which is mentioned in *Meghadūta* 1.25. If the cloud had pursued its route towards the north from Vidiśā instead of making the (rather unnatural) detour west to Ujjayinī, as the *yakṣa* recommends in verse 1.28, it would have reached Deogarh. Hence we may surmise that the cloud's round-about way over Ujjayinī is not merely prompted by Kālidāsa's fondness for (presumably) his home-town, but maybe also by his desire to have the cloud worship at Śiva's Mahākāla shrine, rather than

- in all the holy places dedicated to Śiva and his family, the cloud should worship the god with devotion (*bhakti*) and perform a *pūjā*, something the *yakṣa* never requests him to do for Viṣṇu. This last point is perhaps the clinching one when it comes to evaluating Kālidāsa's religious affinities, and seems beyond doubt to confirm the poet's partiality for the god Śiva.

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have it visit a temple of Viṣṇu. But unfortunately, this must remain a matter of conjecture due to the uncertainty of the dates.

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